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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a review of the current literature on the new rhetoric. It traces the noticeable resurgence of interest in rhetoric among teachers of English and composition since the College Composition and Communication Conference in Los Angeles in the spring of 1963, citing the contributions of Martin J. Steinmann, Kenneth Burke, Francis Christensen, Robert M. Gorrell, and I. A. Richards as central to the development of the new rhetoric. With the initiation of the new journal "Philosophy and Rhetoric" in 1968, a reversal of the divorce between rhetoric and philosophy that was effected in the seventeenth century occurred. Several works on rhetorical theory, including Kinneavy's "A Theory of Discourse," are reviewed, and the prospects of the new rhetoric in the remainder of the decade are discussed. (RB)

NCTE Convention, Las Vegas, Nevada
TOWARD A NEW RHETORIC, 3:00-5:00 p.m.
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RHETORIC: OLDEN NEW

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When I was asked to review the development of the "new rhetoric," the chilling thought occurred to me that I was no more clairvoyant on this subject than many of my colleagues. But anyone who has kept his eyes and ears open in recent years could readily detect that something was happening on the rhetorical scene. Not all of the developments have taken place on the surface, of course, but I have been able to supplement what simple observation revealed with what I have gathered from attendance at private seances on rhetoric. Let us say that where my eyes and ears have failed to disclose the message of the medium, I have managed to keep in touch through the table-rappings.

I date the noticeable resurgence of interest in rhetoric among teachers of English--certainly among teachers of composition--from the time of the CCCC convention in Los Angeles in the spring of 1963. At that meeting, an unusual number of panels and workshops carried the word rhetoric in their titles, and several of the papers from that meeting were published in the October, 1963 issue of CCC and later were gathered in a pamphlet entitled "Toward a New Rhetoric." Included in that gathering were two of the most oft-reprinted and most influential articles ever published in the CCC journal--Francis Christensen's "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence" and Wayne Booth's "The Rhetorical Stance."

The interest in rhetoric generated at that meeting continued to grow, so that by December of the following year, Robert Gorrell was prompted to bring together for a two-day meeting in Denver ten interested rhetoricians to discuss the status and future of rhetorical studies, and Wayne Booth

CS 200 827

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announced in a General Session of the MLA meeting in New York that we seemed to be "in the midst of a revival of rhetoric unmatched in the twentieth century." In a report to the CCCC membership about his conference, Robert Gorrell noted the renewed interest in classical rhetoric and the contributions that had been made to the development of a new rhetoric by such men as I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, Francis Christensen, Richard Ohmann, and Kenneth Pike, and he concluded that "there may be no new rhetoric, but new rhetorics are developing."(1) In his address at MLA, Wayne Booth suggested some of the directions that the new rhetoric might take and then posed this challenge to his audience of English teachers: "If, as I am assuming, you want to do serious intellectual work without undue penalties from society and if--like most of us--you want your work to have some relevance to the real needs of society, you need neither to blush nor to tighten your belt when you turn from belles lettres to rhetoric."(2)

By 1965, the movement was firmly on the march. Rhetoric texts, articles, and collections of theoretical and practical essays on rhetoric began to appear in increasing numbers. Invitational conferences for interested rhetoricians were held at meetings of the CCCC, NCTE, MLA, the Speech Association and at universities like Villanova, Pennsylvania, UCLA, University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee, Louisiana State, and the University of Minnesota. Nineteen sixty-five was also the year when the first of the NDEA summer institutes for the retraining of secondary teachers of English were funded by the U.S. Office of Education. From 1965 through the summer of 1969, most of the NDEA institutes offered a three-branched course of study for their participants--in linguistics, practical criticism, and composition--and many of those composition courses introduced teachers to the history, theory, and practice of rhetoric.

In 1967, three collections of essays that indicated the progress made by the new rhetoric were published--Martin J. Steinmann's New Rhetorics (New York: Scribner's), Francis Christensen's Notes Toward a New Rhetoric (New York: Harper and Row), and Robert M. Gorrell's Rhetoric: Theories for Application (Champaign, Ill.:

NCTE). But 1967 was also the year when the two reports about the Anglo-American Dartmouth Conference were published—~~Robert~~ Herbert J. Muller's The Uses of English and John Dixon's Growth Through English. One of the effects of those two reports, with their revelations about innovative practices in some of the British schools, was that the ardor for the structured approach of formal rhetoric began to cool. But one of the beneficent effects of that cooling of ardor was that those who were seriously interested in rhetoric got out of the limelight and that as the result of gaining the leisure and the privacy to cultivate their interest, they made some solid gains in the development of a "new rhetoric." I should like to review those gains as I see them.

One of the notable features of recent developments in the study of rhetoric is that many of the promising trends mentioned in the discussions of the mid-1960's have been brought to fruition, not only by the men whose names had been associated with those trends but also by men who had been working away quietly after their interest had been piqued by the early discussions. Of the major figures mentioned in those early discussions Kenneth Burke seems to have had the greatest staying power and the most influence. Burke's insistence that the new rhetoric must avail itself of the findings and insights of disciplines like anthropology, psychology, psycholinguistics, general semantics, and communications theory, has considerably broadened the purview of rhetoric, and his shift of the objective of rhetorical discourse from persuasion primarily or exclusively to the more general aim of identification has extended the range of the modes of discourse that rhetoric is concerned with. Among the new rhetoricians, W. Ross Winterowd evinces the greatest influence by Burke. (3)

The other major figure frequently mentioned in the discussions of the development of a new rhetoric was I. A. Richards. But while Richards remains a significant figure in the theory and practice of literary criticism, his influence on recent developments in rhetoric has been negligible. His name is

rarely mentioned now by the new rhetoricians, and his Philosophy of Rhetoric has had no visible impact on the books and articles that have been published in the last five years. If the twitch of renewed interest in semantics that has been observed recently is galvanized, Richards may once again exert an influence on the development of a new rhetoric, for Richards saw rhetoric primarily as a study of how language works to produce understanding (or misunderstanding) in an audience.

Since his death in April, 1963, Richard M. Weaver of the University of Chicago has come to be recognized more and more as a major figure in twentieth-century rhetoric.(4) Weaver was one of that group of Southern Agrarians which included such men as John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and Donald Davidson. Although Weaver had an intimate knowledge of the rhetorical works of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, his primary allegiance was to Plato among the classical rhetoricians and to Kenneth Burke among the modern rhetoricians. Viewing rhetoric as "persuasive speech in the service of truth," he has been one of the major proponents, along with Maurice Natanson and Henry Johnstone,(5) of a reunion of rhetoric and dialectic. Although his college textbook Composition: A Course in Writing and Composition, first published by Holt in 1957, went into a posthumous second edition in 1967, Weaver's future influence on the development of rhetorical theory is likely to be exerted mainly by the remarkable collection of essays published under the title of The Ethics of Rhetoric (Henry Regnery, 1953) and by that classic essay "Language Is Sermonic," which is now more readily available in the memorial volume published in 1970 by the Louisiana State University Press.

A significant reversal of the divorce between rhetoric and philosophy that Ramus effected in the seventeenth century took place in 1968 with the initiation of the new journal Philosophy and Rhetoric at Pennsylvania State University under the editorship of Henry Johnstone and Carroll C. Arnold. Although this journal is not yet widely known to teachers of English, it has become "must reading"

for those interested in the philosophical dimensions of rhetorical studies. Two of its most important contributions to rhetorical studies were (1) the publication, in its first issue, of Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation," an article that has been frequently alluded to or quoted from in recent books and articles on rhetoric and (2) the introduction to an American audience of the rhetorical works of the Belgian philosopher Chaim Perelman. An English translation of Perelman's major rhetorical work, which first appeared in France in 1958, was published by the University of Notre Dame Press in 1970, under the title The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation. (6)

It is impossible in the time available to me to convey the substance and the excitement of Perelman's exploration of the problem of how men, through the medium of verbal discourse, "induce or increase the mind's adherence to theses presented for its assent." Briefly however, let me say that like the English philosopher Stephen Toulmin, Perelman has been dissatisfied with the applicability of Descartes' kind of scientific logic to the problems of decision-making in human affairs. Recognizing that most issues about which men argue exist in the realm of the contingent and the probable, Perelman has found his models of non-formal reasoning and effective persuasive in the kind of "dialectical proofs" that Aristotle dealt with in the Topics and the Rhetoric and in the strategies of proof, especially precedent, that lawyers resort to in the courtroom. Perelman claims that "only the existence of an argumentation that is neither compelling nor arbitrary can give meaning to human freedom, a state in which a reasonable choice can be exercised" (The New Rhetoric, p. 514). It is fascinating to watch Perelman fashion that kind of argumentation from his observation of the manifold psychological, social, and cultural influences which shape modern man.

With all the talk about the "new rhetoric" that has been going on since the early sixties, many of us have waited patiently--and somewhat skeptically--for the appearance of a really innovative rhetoric text for the classroom.

At last an innovative rhetoric textbook has been published--Rhetoric: Discovery and Change (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1970) by Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike. This book demonstrates how Kenneth Pike's linguistic theory of tagmemics might be used to help students improve their competence in writing. The contributions of tagmemics to the process of writing are presented in a series of six maxims, which control the exposition of theory and practice in successive chapters of the book. I won't list here those six maxims, because without the explanations that accompany them in the text, the one-sentence maxims would be meaningless to those not familiar with Pike's theory. In general, however, these maxims set up a heuristic procedure that serves three functions:

(1) It aids the investigator in retrieving relevant information that he has stored in his mind.

(2) It draws attention to important information that the investigator does not possess but can acquire by direct observation, reading, experimentation, and so on.

(3) It prepares the investigator's mind for the intuition of an ordering principle or hypothesis. (Young, Becker, and Pike, p. 120)

This heuristic procedure has bearings on all the traditional stages of the rhetorical process: discovering something to say, selecting and adapting the discovered material to fit a particular audience, organizing it, and verbalizing it. Although the Young-Becker-Pike book does not represent a synthesis of the bits and pieces of the "new rhetorics" that have been developing independently over the last ten years, it is truly a new rhetoric text for the college classroom.

Another highly original rhetoric text by an English teacher for English teachers was published this fall--James L. Kinneavy's A Theory of Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971). Drawing from an amazingly wide range of works not only by ancient and contemporary rhetoricians but also by communications theorists, psychologists, logicians, philosophers, historians, literary critics, and linguists, Kinneavy classifies the various aims of discourse

into four main categories: Reference Discourse (with its sub-categories of Scientific, Informative, and Exploratory), Persuasive Discourse, Expressive Discourse, and Literary Discourse. He explores the distinctive nature, logic, organization, and style of each of these "aims of discourse," and presents detailed analyses of contemporary examples of each of these kinds. When Kinneavy completes a second volume, which will deal with the modes of discourse, this enterprise--and enterprise is not too grandiose a word to use--will represent the most comprehensive and thorough-going study of English prose discourse that has ever been written.

Kinneavy's A Theory of Discourse is only one of a number of impressive books on rhetorical theory that have been published in recent years. Even ten years ago an English teacher who was devising an upper-division or graduate course in rhetoric would have been hard put to it to find three or four suitable texts for such a course. Now, in addition to Kinneavy's book, he has available W. Ross Winterowd's Rhetoric: A Synthesis (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968), Jim Corder's The Uses of Rhetoric (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1971), James Moffett's Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), and most recently James E. Miller's Word, Self, Reality: The Rhetoric of Imagination (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972). Before 1965 relatively inexpensive collections of excerpts from the important rhetoric texts of the past were not available for such classes. Now there are available such collections as Dudley Bailey's Essays on Rhetoric (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), John E. Jordan's Questions of Rhetoric (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), Thomas W. Benson and Michael Prosser's Readings in Classical Rhetoric (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1969), and James L. Golden and Edward P.J. Corbett's The Rhetoric of Blair, Campbell, and Whately (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968). And in 1965, Joseph Schwartz and John Rycenga published their excellent collection of secondary articles on rhetoric, The Province of Rhetoric (New York: Ronald Press, 1965). Even if advanced courses in rhetoric as an intellectual discipline are not

yet firmly entrenched in many English department curricula, the publication of these books in recent years has at least made possible the establishment of such courses. That is some kind of progress.

What are the prospects for the new rhetoric in the remainder of this decade? In 1970, the two conferences of the National Developmental Project on Rhetoric, under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, sought answers for that question. For the first of these conferences, held in January, 1970 at the Johnson Wingspread Center in Racine, Wisconsin, twelve prominent scholars in the field of rhetoric, (7) representing such varied disciplines as Speech, Communications, Philosophy, English, and Sociology, prepared papers in response to the question "What is the essential outline of a conception of rhetoric useful in the second half of the twentieth century?" The issues, practices, and lines of research defined by this first conference provided the agenda for the second conference, held in St. Charles, Illinois in May, 1970. The twenty-three scholars who participated in this second conference were divided into three committees: the Committee on the Scope of Rhetoric and the Place of Rhetorical Studies in Higher Education, the Committee on the Advancement and Refinement of Rhetorical Criticism, and the Committee on the Nature of Rhetorical Invention. The charge to the members of this second conference was to translate the recommendations of the first conference into curricular and pedagogical terms.

The papers, deliberations, and recommendations of these two conferences were published this fall in a book entitled The Prospect of Rhetoric, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971). Some of the motifs running through most of the discussions are as follows: (1) that rhetoric should be restored to the curriculum as a humanistic study which cuts across departmental lines; (2) that rhetoric must broaden its scope to include those modes of discourse and those media of communication that traditionally have not been dealt with by rhetoricians; (3) that our concept of the faculties and the factors involved in decision-making should be expanded and

clarified; (4) that rhetorical invention should be restored to a position of centrality in rhetorical theory and practice.

It is possible, of course, that the messages of this National Developmental Project on Rhetoric will drop like a stone into a deep pool. But if the deliberations and recommendations of these conferences exert some influence on those university committees currently involved in revamping the curriculum of colleges within the university, the future of rhetorical studies could be very bright indeed.

This review of recent developments in rhetorical studies has been hardly more than a litany of names and titles and dates. Most of the books I have mentioned would require a full-fledged lecture or article to adequately unfold their riches. But given my ~~time~~ limited time, I saw no better way to give you an idea of the variety of developments in rhetorical studies in the last ten years. Rhetorical studies have engaged a relatively small cadre of talented and committed people. These dedicated rhetoricians have not yet gained the ear of many people in adademia or in the community at large. They talk feverishly among themselves in invitational seminars at national conventions, in the journals, and in a steady exchange of correspondence among the members of the newly formed Rhetoric Society. But the point is that in this, the most rhetorical age in the history of man, some good hard thinking has been done in recent years about the role of rhetoric in the modern world, and the fruits of that thinking will be available if rhetoric regains even a corner of the dominant position it once held in the liberal-arts curriculum. As James McCrimmon, himself a practicing rhetorician, said two years ago in an article in the CCC journal: "I think we will be unwise if we dismiss the revived concern with rhetoric as just another of those fads which we periodically endure. The new rhetorics have a lineage of twenty-five hundred years, and what is new in them is not impromptu; it is the reflection of serious scholarship in several fields for upwards of fifty years." (8)

Footnotes for

RHETORIC: OLDEN NEW

[1] Robert M. Gorell, "'Very Like a Whale'--A Report on Rhetoric," 16 (October, 1965), 140.

[2] Wayne C. Booth, "The Revival of Rhetoric," PMLA, 80 (May, 1965), 12.

[3] See Winterowd's acknowledgment of his debt to Kenneth Burke in the Preface to his Rhetoric: A Synthesis (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968).

[4] See the assessment of Weaver's contribution to rhetoric in the introductory chapters of Language Is Sermonic: Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric, ed. Richard L. Johannesen, Rennard Strickland, and Ralph T. Eubanks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970).

[5] See Maurice Natanson and Henry Johnstone, Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965).

[6] For a convenient summary of Perelman's "new rhetoric," see Ray D. Dearin, "The Philosophical Basis of Chaim Perelman's Theory of Rhetoric," QJS, 55 (October, 1969), 213-24. See also Carroll C. Arnold's review of The New Rhetoric in QJS, 56 (February, 1970), 87-92.

[7] The participants in the first conference were Karl R. Wallace, Samuel L. Becker, Richard McKeon, Lawrence W. Rosenfield, Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., Wayne C. Booth, Chaim Perelman, Wayne Brockriede, Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Barnet Baskerville, Edward P.J. Corbett, Donald C. Bryant, Carroll C. Arnold, and Lloyd F. Bitzer.

[8] "Will New Rhetorics Produce a New Emphasis in the Composition Class?" CCC, 20 (May, 1969), 129.